

# **American Muslims: Living the Dream**

**A Monograph  
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## **Abstract**

AMERICAN MUSLIMS: LIVING THE DREAM by MAJ Matthew P. Neumeyer, US Army, 51 pages.

Muslim immigrants in the United States share the same characteristics as any other immigrant group coming to America looking for a chance at prosperity. Immigrants form close communities, maintain many of their customs and cultural ties to their home countries and their faith. However, Muslim immigrants are at the center of a large struggle between Western governments, moderate Muslim communities and extremist groups. In spite of these pressures, Muslim Americans have proven resistant to radicalism and extremist ideology. Their success in education, finance, and integration into American society has defeated radicalization and its violent component. In stark contrast to Western European Muslim communities, Muslim Americans are more like their non-Muslim neighbors than Muslim immigrant populations in other Western democracies. However, there are risks to Muslim Americans that create potential for possible violent extremism; Muslim leaders, communities, and the United States must address the risks to prevent the growth of homegrown Muslim extremists.

The social mechanisms of why a person chooses to become radical and subsequently violent are not based on specific ideologies; instead, the process is common to all, whether Salafi jihadists or white supremacists. An individual becomes vulnerable when they have a break, real or perceived, between their expectations and reality - extremist organizations exploit this conflict through social networks and their ideological message. Radical groups present their ideology as the answer or explanation for the individual's conflict, persuade the individual of its correctness and then offer methods, often violent, to address the larger issues.

Western European Muslims' and Muslim Americans' differences illustrate the reasons Americans are more resistant to radical ideology. The legacy of colonial prejudice and the poor economic situation of European Muslims is the opposite of the Muslim Americans' experience, which mirrors American society in terms of education and financial success, giving a sense of integration. Muslim Americans exhibit fewer dangerous factors than their brethren in Europe or worldwide, making it more difficult for extremists using an Islamic framework. However, there still exists potential issues in the perception of bias in Western governments, especially in relation to Islam and foreign policy, and a continuing rift in both Muslim and non-Muslim societal views of one another.

Muslim American leaders' primary concerns center on sustaining a rich Islamic identity among the community of believers, prospering within their adopted societies, and defeating extremist ideology. These leaders face the need to counter currents that create radicalization while at the same time maintaining their credibility within their community. The appearance of collaboration would end their influence. Therefore, Western government actions must focus on strengthening moderate and pluralist beliefs within the Muslim immigrant community while exposing extremist ideology as a political monster. The methods and policies of Muslim leaders and Western governments should emphasize the similarities and potential successes versus the differences. Differences in culture and religion exist for Muslim and non-Muslims, but they do not represent a drastic departure from any other immigrant group and can be overcome. Muslim moderate communities, Western governments and non-Muslim society must develop means to mitigate or eliminate factors that increase the risk of radicalization in individuals and allow extremist groups the ability to operate in Western societies. Once these are developed, these stakeholders can create momentum to resist exploitation of groups and healthy integration of Muslims in non-Muslim societies.

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## Introduction

My first experience with Islam was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade on a football field in South Dearborn. At that time, east and south Dearborn were predominantly Arab-American and Muslim, while west Dearborn where I lived was mostly white and Christian. Our school was playing the south side school Salinas Junior High. Late in the second quarter, a local mosque began to play the call to prayer over a loud speaker. The boys on my team were confused and did not understand what was going on – there was a pause in the game as the call finished and people were walking toward the mosque. As quick as it happened, it was over and we were trying to hold Salinas' offense. It was a quick snapshot of a different world which was literally minutes from my home but I did not know it existed. My awareness dramatically changed over the next few years as I went to school with more Muslims. By the end of high school, I had teammates with names like Mohammed, Ali, Doraid and Huysan in typical American sports like football, basketball and baseball. They fasted during the month of Ramadan, observed halal diets and overall represented their religion with pride and integrity. I never thought of them as anything but Americans. However, I came to realize the differences in US public perception when I joined the Army and especially after 9/11. When I deployed to Kosovo, a predominantly Albanian Muslim area, I heard the same call to prayer the first Friday night of our arrival, just like the day on the football field. It had the same effect, surprising and concerning the soldiers just like it had for me as a boy in a suburb of Detroit. In the ensuing conversation, I was surprised at the lack of understanding of the religion, the belief in myth and overall negative perception of Islam. It was a dramatic illustration of the contrast between two equally American populations.

Muslims in the United States share the same characteristics as any other immigrant group coming to America looking for a chance at prosperity for them and their families. Immigrants form close communities, maintain many of their customs and cultural ties to their home countries and their faith. However, Muslim immigrants are at the center of a struggle between Western

governments, moderate Muslim communities and extremist groups.<sup>1</sup> In spite of these pressures, Muslim Americans have proven resistant to extremist ideology and radicalism. Their success in education, finance, and integration into American society has defeated radicalization and its violent component. In stark contrast to Western European Muslim communities, Muslim Americans are more like their non-Muslim neighbors than Muslim immigrant populations in other Western democracies. However, there are risks to Muslim Americans that create the potential for possible extremism; Muslim leaders, communities, and the United States must address the risks to prevent the growth of 'homegrown' Muslim extremists.

Radicalization and violent extremism is not new to the United States. Radical ideologies exist throughout the United States in religious, political, and environmental movements and organizations, like white supremacists and the Environmental Liberation Front. Timothy McVeigh's attack in Oklahoma City is probably the best known case of a 'home grown' terrorist driven by extremist ideology. The social mechanisms of why a person chooses to become radical and subsequently violent are not based on specific ideologies; instead, the process is common to all, whether Salafi jihadists or white supremacists. The context of an individual's personal life drives whether likely contributing factors make a person more or less likely to choose a radical ideology. An individual becomes vulnerable when they have a break, real or perceived, between their expectations and reality - extremist organizations exploit this conflict through social networks and their ideological message. Radical groups present their ideology as the answer or explanation for the individual's conflict, persuade the individual of its correctness and then offer methods, often violent, to address the larger issues. Muslim Americans exhibit fewer dangerous factors than their brethren in Europe or worldwide, making it more difficult for extremists using an Islamic framework. However, there still exists potential issues in the perception of bias in

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, Western nations, governments or democracies refers to the pluralist governments located primarily in Western Europe, e.g. Germany, Great Britain, France, etc., and North America, e.g. the US and Canada.

Western governments, especially in relation to Islam and foreign policy, and a continuing rift in both Muslim and non-Muslim societal views of one another. These discussions are widely supported in secondary literature written since 9/11, as social and political scientists, historians and journalists have tried to understand and describe the reasons for radical behavior, especially in Islamic communities. Thoughts on individual, group and government behavior have dominated numerous articles and books since the end of the Cold War and specifically since September 11, 2001.

Western European Muslims' and Muslim Americans' differences illustrate the reasons Americans are more resistant to radical ideology. The legacy of colonial prejudice and the poor economic situation of European Muslims is the opposite of the Muslim American experience, which mirrors American society in terms of education and financial success, giving a sense of integration. Importantly, Muslim Americans describe themselves in terms similar to those of American non-Muslims. However, similarities also exist between American and European Muslims that represent potential risk factors. Both Muslim communities have similarly negative perceptions of Western nations' foreign policies in relation to Muslim states and conflicts. They also have portions of their groups who view extremist ideology as viable and their violent methods like suicide bombing as justifiable, though Muslim Americans are fewer in numbers than their counterparts around the world and in Europe. Most importantly, there exists a perception of Islamic isolation, for both Muslims and non-Muslims in Western democracies. This is the most dangerous, as it perpetuates a belief of irreconcilable views between the two societies.

Represented strongly in Samuel Huntington's book "Clash of Civilizations," the idea of inherent conflict is found in both communities. Common to Western Islamic communities is the historical narrative of conflict between East and West and Islam as a unifying factor. Islam is perceived as the greatest strength and weakness of Western Muslim communities. It provides the social structure and stability for many immigrants in the West as they make the difficult transition from



one culture to another, but it also provides extremists a convenient framework from which to recruit and operate, as they exploit and pervert Islamic belief to support their extremist ideology.

To determine differences and commonalities in populations, researchers often use polling data and population statistics to illustrate their point. Both European and American census data has limited utility for studying religious issues because of church and state separation restrictions in Western secular governments. However, the Pew Research Center filled this gap in knowledge with two recent reports: *Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity* and *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*.<sup>2</sup> The two studies of the American and European Muslim communities show qualitative evidence for European and American Muslims and Muslim Americans and non-Muslims. In addition, one can capture the words, spoken or written, of current leaders and organizations in the current dialogue to determine their view of themselves, their community and their governments. Qualitative data and current Western Islamic dialogue provide a solid picture of Muslims in Europe and North America.

What are the implications? Muslim Americans' primary concerns center on sustaining a rich Islamic identity among the community of believers, prospering within their adopted societies, and defeating extremist ideology. Leaders face the need to counter currents that create radicalization while at the same time maintaining their credibility within their community. The appearance of collaboration would end their influence. Therefore, Western government actions must focus on strengthening moderate and pluralist beliefs within the Muslim immigrant community while exposing extremist ideology as a political monster. The methods and policies of Muslim leaders and Western governments should emphasize the similarities and potential

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<sup>2</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity*, (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, July 6, 2006); The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, May 22, 2007).

successes versus the differences. Muslim leaders and Western governments must work to destroy this dilemma for Muslim leaders and communities: do they defend their religion and risk perpetuating misconceptions of their defense as support for extremism, or do they remain quiet and risk Muslims viewing them as conspirators and losing the faith of their constituencies. Differences in culture and religion exist for Muslim and non-Muslims, but they are not different from previous immigrant groups and they can overcome their issues.

The paper explores the role of the individual and groups in radicalization and how this relates to Muslims in Europe and the United States. First, it will illustrate how the individual is the central character to radicalization. The individual exists in an environment containing contributing and mitigating factors; an analysis of the factors acting on an individual and his community helps determine the propensity for extremism. Additionally, though factors are important, the critical event for the individual is his questioning of his belief system and a subsequent search for resolution. Second, the paper portrays the role of extremist groups. The same factors that facilitate extremism in a person also establish conditions conducive to the existence of extremist groups. The paper offers two theories to explain the methods extremists use to frame the problem for an individual and then convince him the group's ideology is the best option to address his issues. Overall, the contributing factors and extremists interact with the main character, an individual in crisis; the paper demonstrates how this interaction models the behavior of Muslim minority communities in Western nations.

Third, the paper outlines the conditions for Muslim minorities in Europe and the United States and how the dissimilar environments of the two areas result in very different situations for radicalization. In Europe, a greater number of risk factors and few mitigating conditions have created an environment conducive for extremist groups to prey on Muslims who experience a rupture in their belief system. In the United States, Muslim success in wealth, education and community has made Muslims stakeholders in the American system, reducing the space and support for extremist groups and reducing the pool of potential of recruits. Muslim Americans

want to preserve and expand their place in American culture and view extremism as a threat to their success. Finally, the paper lists potential actions to create or strengthen mitigating factors and eliminate or marginalize contributing factors to reduce the risk in individuals, make it difficult for extremists to operate and reinforce moderate Muslim messages.

## **Roles in Radicalization**

Understanding the formation of an extremist requires answering three questions. The first is: what is the role of the individual? The individual is not a benign object in violent radicalization. The context of an individual's life is critical to the potential of developing an extremist. Therefore, it is critical to understand the conditions required to develop the potential for a person to choose an extremist ideology. It leads to the second question: what is the role of extremist groups - can they create conditions or only exploit them? The characteristics of extremist ideology attract and repel potential participants. The discussion of the role of the ideological movements is similar to the chicken or the egg analogy: do they create the conditions or do the conditions create them? These issues are not confined to Islamic extremists, as they often explain a generic process through which an individual becomes radical or violent for a cause. However, Western Muslim communities face specific challenges within the context of these concepts because of Islam. This is the third question: What is the role of Islam in extremism? Some theorists argue Islam has a confrontational nature and a greater potential for violent extremist ideology.<sup>3</sup> However, many scholars dispute the concept of violent Islam, countering that Islam is no more violent than any other religion and contains pluralistic concepts compatible with Western democracy.<sup>4</sup> As in any contentious topic, both positions have merit, but

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); Samuel P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996). Pipes argues Islamists are inherently violent and intolerant; Huntington sees Islam as incompatible with Western ideas; in doing so, both authors make the religion the main reason for extremist ideology.

<sup>4</sup> Reza Aslan, *No god but God*, (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006); Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Both argue

in the end, Islam is important to Muslims and therefore is important to the discussion of Muslim minority communities.

Extremism has different meaning to different groups and persons. The definition of specific terms is part of the intense debate surrounding the topic of Western Muslim extremism. For the purposes of this paper, radical and radicalization will represent a concept or a process that is considered outside of core beliefs and thoughts and exclusionary in nature. Extremists are radical in thought, and most importantly, use violence or the threat of violence to achieve their objectives. The paper will not use the term fundamentalism because it is interpreted many different and disparate ways, from conservative or pious to inherently violent. In principle, radicals and extremists believe their belief system can not exist in harmony with different systems. For example, Wahhabi Muslims are often described as radical because their beliefs are not considered commensurate with most of mainstream Islamic practices and they call Muslims who does not follow their ideology apostates; Wahhabis exclude them from their Islamic system. Salafi jihadists have an ideology based on similar beliefs, but they believe they must commit violence against non-Muslims and apostates as part of this exclusion. For the United States, a radical would believe America is corrupt and requires change that included the exclusion or prejudice against another group or system. An extremist would concur, but add that violence was sanctioned and required to bring about that change.<sup>5</sup>

In the formation of extremists, two theories exist that strongly explain the phenomenon of radicalization, socialization and social movement theory. Each theory represents the other as insufficient to explain all the mechanisms involved in the extremism of an individual. The

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Islam is not violent and inherently pluralist. They state extremists have stolen the voice of Islam as a religion and Western societies and governments ignore the majority of peaceful Muslims.

<sup>5</sup> Different cultures disagree on the terms radicalization and extremism and their use to describe particular groups, making it a contentious issue. The definitions are those of the author and do not reflect specific definitions from other sources. However, the author has used the study of this topic to form his opinions.

schools of thought differ primarily in the degree of focus on particular levels of analysis, the individual versus the group. The first, socialization, focuses on the individual choice to adopt a radical or extremist view; the theory focuses on the person's importance in creating the impetus for change and the group ideology taking advantage of the personal crisis.<sup>6</sup> The second, social movement theory, stresses the group's role in exploiting a social movement, an amalgamation of individuals formed to address a common grievance.<sup>7</sup> According to this school of thought, extremist groups influence persons with particular profiles and represent the groups' radical explanation of the social issue as a version of what the person already believes is true. Both arguments compliment each other as they borrow concepts for different levels (individual versus group), though they generally portray each other as lacking the explanatory power for all mechanisms.

## **Individual Vulnerabilities to Extremism**

The basis for violent radical behavior is the individual. A person must make a choice to commit violence in the name of a political objective, possibly resulting in the person's death. This is more difficult to understand in the context of democratic systems where individual freedoms and access to opportunity and success are very different from the home lands of immigrants. However, the study of terrorism and its rationale is very clear - the possibility of violence exists everywhere.

In the 1970's and 1980's a debate developed among counterterrorism stakeholders over the cause of an individual's development into a terrorist. The prominent view was terrorists exhibited psychopathic behavior, and therefore, the methods to identify and mitigate such

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<sup>6</sup> See Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

behavior would prevent terrorism. Called the “syndrome” approach, it treats terrorism like a disease, looking for symptoms and manifestations of the problem in individuals.<sup>8</sup> However, interviews with failed suicide bombers and jailed terrorists suggested most did not possess uniform backgrounds or paths to terrorism similar to psychopathic behavior, like poverty, poor education or abuse; they came from many different social, financial and educational backgrounds and experiences. The theory failed to identify clearly defined, absolute root causes that would allow doctors, psychologists, law enforcement and governments to eradicate terrorist behavior with clinical methods, treatments or policies. However, the approach did provide the insight to explain how individuals of varied backgrounds could radicalize. Scholars identified that contributing factors could create an environment of relative deficiency when an individual is susceptible to the suggestion of using a violent methods abhorred in most societies.<sup>9</sup>

Marc Sageman describes this relative state as a necessary condition for terrorism but not a sufficient condition in and of itself to produce terrorists or extremist behavior.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the concept of “contributing factors” informs the most prevalent views on individual extremist development. Shira Fishman and Arie W. Kruglanski suggest the contributing factors or conditions include relative deprivation, mortality salience, right-wing authoritarianism, collectivism, sensation seeking, cognitive styles and group dynamics.<sup>11</sup> Marc Sageman describes four factors: a sense of moral outrage, a specific interpretation of the world, resonance with personal experiences, and mobilization through networks.<sup>12</sup> Because the conditions are necessary

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<sup>8</sup> Shira Fishman and Arie W. Kruglanski, “The Psychology of Terrorism: ‘Syndrome’ versus ‘tool’ Perspectives,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18 (2006): 194.

<sup>9</sup> Fishman and Kruglanski, 194.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 74-78.

<sup>11</sup> Fishman and Kruglanski, 197-200.

<sup>12</sup> Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Radicalization of Global Islamist Terrorists*, Marc Sageman (June 17, 2007), 2.

but not sufficient to create an extremist, all or very few may exist in a person who chooses violent extremism, but the categories may be predictive in that an individual who falls within one or more may have a greater propensity to become extreme. Immigrant communities, no matter their ethnicity or religion, have greater contributing factors; they develop collective views, experience bigotry or prejudice, exhibit strong group dynamics and an ‘us versus them’ mentality, all of which are contributing conditions for individual radicalization. These lists are good for initial inquiry and research but are not exhaustive, and observers must study the individual and his community’s context to determine what factors contribute and which mitigate.

However, contributing factors explain only a person’s propensity for radicalization, not the eventual mechanism that propels the individual forward. The most important action is the individual’s initiation of a “cognitive opening,” described as an uncertainty in their accepted beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Anything could trigger a cognitive opening (loss of job, family death, serious injury, bigotry), but its purpose is to drive the person to find certainty in his belief system.<sup>14</sup> The most prevalent theories may argue the importance of the individual versus organization, but they all recognize a mechanism in an individual's thinking prompting them to question their own beliefs or understanding of their environment. The combination of questioning of personal values and an environment conducive to the development of extremism creates the greater possibility of individual extremism.

The second and third generations native born in Western Europe represent the largest at risk group; they represent a confluence of contributing factors that create the greatest risk for extremism. As later generations, they are more likely to develop the perception they identify with neither their ancestral home nor the surrounding non-Muslim society. They did not experience the difficulties or conflict that required the first generation to migrate; it facilitates a romantic

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<sup>13</sup> Wiktorowicz, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Wiktorowicz, 5.

view of the homeland unbalanced with the strife first generation immigrants experienced.<sup>15</sup>

Factors exist in Western Europe that make assimilation prohibitive, including the cultural contrast of Muslim adherents and non-Muslims, the legacies of racism and colonialism, and current world events.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, later generations often experience a “spiritual awakening,” a reexamination of their faith.<sup>17</sup> Unencumbered with the local cultural customs or stigmas of their parents’ practices, they often seek versions of faith that can answer questions more pertinent to them, specifically their confused identity. Coupled with a larger context of global conflict and issues related to Islam, these later generations combine these factors to present a population at extreme risk.

A likely scenario illustrates the issues compounding the effect of multiple contributing factors. A first or second generation native born Muslim male could grow up in a Western nation and attend public school; he probably speaks multiple languages, has gained a greater level of education than his parents and has more daily contact with Western cultural practices, like dating, dress, movies, television, and music. The religious practices of his parents may not adequately address the clash of his community identity and the surrounding non-Muslim society. Factors of unemployment or instances of prejudices exacerbate the issue; though educated and participative in his society, he perceives an inherent inequity because society does not reward his endeavors within the framework of the cultural environment. This example is typical of many of the Islamic extremists who have committed or attempted to commit violence in Europe, like Mohammed Bouyeri, the Dutch extremist who killed the filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Bouyeri was born in the

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., introduction to *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 5-6

<sup>16</sup> Robert S. Leiken, “Europe’s Angry Muslims,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no.4, (July/August 2005): 4. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050701faessay84409/robert-s-leiken/europe-s-angry-muslims.html> (accessed February 4, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-5; Jocelyne Cesari, “Muslim Minorities in Europe: the Silent Revolution,” in *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and in Europe*, ed. John Esposito and Francois Burgat (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 126.



Netherlands in a Muslim enclave community and was a good student, attending college, but he was unemployed and jailed for a number of months, where he was introduced to radical doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

## Islam: Strength and Vulnerability

Islam is the most polarizing subject in a discussion of Muslim communities, especially in Western nations. It is vehemently attacked as the root cause, the most important feature of extremist violence, or vehemently defended as the greatest mitigating factor for peaceful solutions, the reason many denounce terrorists acting in the name of Islam. The truth is much more nuanced and often drowned in the extremes of both arguments. Islam is a defining feature of Muslim communities, whether they are majorities or minorities, like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or any other religion is a part of a person's or group's composition or identity. The arguments center on who will define its importance to extremist ideology, and as Tariq Ramadan states, "relativity is considered to be an absolute" in this contested discussion.<sup>19</sup> The difficult truth is Islam is the defining part of Muslim identity. Both sides of the argument present their assertions in absolute terms, all or nothing propositions, though it is a much more complex and layered subject. It does not necessarily define an individual or community but it is a critical factor in their belief system and actions. Without this confession, understanding and addressing issues in Muslim communities can not go forward. Therefore, Islam represents a mitigating or contributing factor in a person's identity or a group's beliefs, depending on the context of the situation.

It is a difficult truth, but Islamic extremists use Islam as a foundation for their ideology. Described in more detail in the section on group roles in extremism, radical ideologies use a

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<sup>18</sup> Leiken, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Tariq Ramadan, "Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?" in *Islam: Europe's Second Religion*, ed. Shireen T Hunter (Westport, CT: Preager, 2002), 209.

framework or common reference to recruit potential candidates and Islam is the reference point. Though a contested term, extremists' uses of Islamism is a good example of their perversion of Islam.<sup>20</sup> Adnan Musallum defines Islamism as a "...political ideology which insists that Islam is a way of life encompassing the religious, political, economic, social and all other spheres of life."<sup>21</sup> It developed as a movement that existed as early as the 1930's with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and gained strength in the latter half of the twentieth century after the perceived failures of secular governments and Pan-Arabism in Muslim countries, Israeli victories in the 1967 Six-Day War and the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979.<sup>22</sup> It is a movement that calls for the strenuous application of Islamic principles found in a conservative interpretation of the Quran and Shari'a law, and many see its principles as a possible answer to corrupt or authoritarian governance.<sup>23</sup> Extremist groups like al-Qaeda have used its message to create ideologies that are exclusionary in nature and sanction violence in the name of Islam. They have use parts of Shari'a law to reinforce their message and create a 'zero sum game,' a tactic that reinforces for recruits their special status in their religion, the foundation for their identity, and allows them to justify violence against other Muslims in the name of Islam.<sup>24</sup> While difficult to acknowledge, Islam defines extremist individuals as much as it defines all other Muslims and represents a factor in determining a person's susceptibility to extremism.

The majority of Muslims reject the idea their Islam is inherently violent, extremist and exclusionary and believe it is a strengthening factor for Islamic societies, much like other

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<sup>20</sup> It is contested because many groups are label as "Islamist" but they have very different methods. Islamism is often described as a movement, formed around the idea of strict Islamic interpretation of the Quran and its application in all facets of life. Numerous religious movements, political parties and groups are described as Islamists but never commit or advocate violence to achieve their goals; they are often included with or compared to violent extremists, like global jihadists (al-Qaeda).

<sup>21</sup> Adnan A. Musallum, *From Secularism to Jihad* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2005), viii.

<sup>22</sup> Musallum, viii-ix, 200-202.

<sup>23</sup> Musallum, viii.

<sup>24</sup> Peter P. Mandaville, "Muslim Youth in Europe," in Hunter, 226.

religions proved structure and vigor to their communities. Tariq Ramadan states this phenomenon is related to the confusion of two Muslim areas, religion and politics, fused into one.<sup>25</sup> Religion is often a coping mechanism, linking immigrant populations to comfortable traditions and others experiencing the same issues of isolation.<sup>26</sup> Muslim minorities are frustrated in defending Islam, only to have greater society connect them to violent groups. On Muslim American organizations' websites, they affirm their commitment to the peaceful coexistence with other religions and secular societies and their continued goal to educate the public on Islam.<sup>27</sup> In interviews with US Islamic leaders, each quoted the Quranic passage in "The Table," if you kill one man it is as killing all mankind. If you save one man, it is as saving all mankind."<sup>28</sup> In contrast, many extremist groups use verses in the same chapter to justify killing of non-believers. Charles Alwan, a Muslim leader in Dearborn, Michigan, succinctly described this idea; he called himself a "born again Muslim."<sup>29</sup> He had reexamined his faith in his early adulthood, but did not find an exclusionary and violent system of thought. Later generations often experience a

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<sup>25</sup> Ramadan, "Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?" in Hunter, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "The Articulation of Religion in Domestic Space: Rituals in the Immigrant Muslim Home," in *Contesting Rituals: Islam and Practices of Identity-Making*, ed. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005) 127.

<sup>27</sup> Council on American-Islamic Relations, "Vision, Mission, and Core Principles," [www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com/AboutUs/VisionMissionCorePrinciples.aspx). <http://www.cair.com/AboutUs/VisionMissionCorePrinciples.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007); The American Muslim, "About Us," [www.theamericanmuslim.org](http://www.theamericanmuslim.org). <http://www.theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/tam/about/> (accessed December 18, 2007). The Muslim Chaplains Association, "About The Muslim Chaplains Association," [www.muslimchaplains.org](http://www.muslimchaplains.org). [http://www.muslimchaplains.org/about\\_overview.php](http://www.muslimchaplains.org/about_overview.php) (accessed December 18, 2007); Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy "Mission," [www.Csidonline.org](http://www.Csidonline.org). [http://www.csidonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=category&sectionid=3&id=19&Itemid=47](http://www.csidonline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=category&sectionid=3&id=19&Itemid=47) (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Charles Alwan, interview by author, Dearborn, MI, March 10, 2008; Hajj, interview by author, Dearborn, MI, March 10, 2008; Amad Bedoun, interview by author, Dearborn, MI, March 10, 2008; Ramsey Markley, interview by author, Dearborn, MI, March 11, 2008; Dr. Anan Ameri, Director, Arab-American Museum, interview by author, Dearborn, MI, March 11, 2008. In interviews with seven formal and informal leaders, five quoted this specific passage to describe their interpretation of Islamic principles.

<sup>29</sup> Alwan.

“spiritual awakening,” a reexamination of their faith; they either reaffirm their faith or they search for a new answer.<sup>30</sup>

A monotheistic religion related to Christianity and Judaism, Islam has characteristics and a history that help create a perception of separation with Western nations and society. The Arabic language represents the religion, both in written and spoken form. This prevents accessibility to most Westerners but in contrast provides a common reference for Muslim followers, no matter their ethnicity, as many have an understanding of Arabic though it may not be their first language.<sup>31</sup> Also Islam has a portable nature, in particular contrast with Christianity and Judaism. Its emphasis on the ‘word of God’ represented by the Quran has established a religious ‘overhead’ devoid of requirements for buildings, altars, idols or even religious leaders. While many religious leaders and groups have presented themselves as indispensable in executing and interpreting faith, a Muslim family or individual only requires the words of the Quran and their own commitment.<sup>32</sup> This is both a strength and weakness, but it ensures an easier transition to a new country as the Muslim need not find a leader, group or mosque to practice his faith.

The decentralized hierarchy of Islamic interpretation also contributes to the debate. Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam has numerous views and positions, represented in the split between Shia and Sunni and the different schools of jurisprudence. However, authors acknowledge a paradox exists: while there are varied views, they are in a closed system.<sup>33</sup> While Christian and Jewish scholars may debate what God meant in actions or word, Muslims believe the Quran represents the literal word of God, and therefore, is unchangeable. In this lies the

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<sup>30</sup> Abdo, 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Metcalf, 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Metcalf, 6.

<sup>33</sup> See Reza Aslan, *No god but God*; John Esposito, *Islam: the Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

paradox: because the word of God is absolute, it gives interpretation a sense of finality.<sup>34</sup> The different views within Islam develop dogmatic belief in their ideas. However, because there is no established hierarchy for Islamic clergy or authority, many differing groups and leaders, both religious and secular, have claimed the authority to interpret or decide the meaning of the Quran and Mohammed's sayings.<sup>35</sup> Extremist groups exploit this gap and operate easily, using interpretations to support their philosophy, ideas of salvation and recruiting while using the decisiveness of God's word to support their argument.<sup>36</sup> An important mitigation factor in the US is a majority of US Muslims (60%) believe there "is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of Islam."<sup>37</sup>

A uniquely Islamic characteristic for immigrant Muslim populations is the non-availability of trained religious leaders. In Western countries, Christian and Jewish immigrants have had support structures to develop and certify leaders of their faith; they have often brought their clerical leaders with them. That ability is largely absent from the Western Muslim migrant population and is also an issue throughout Islam.<sup>38</sup> The combination of decentralized leadership and exacting standards in Muslim scholarship creates shortages of trained religious leaders in Muslim countries and even worse in non-Muslim societies. Compounding the problem, the numerous and differing sects often have exacting requirements for imams, requiring many years of study and dedication to become a spiritual leader.<sup>39</sup> The final issue becomes one of religious politics – a Muslim 'scholar' may also gain credibility through leadership abilities (separate of religious knowledge), charisma and historical or familial ties. These scholars represent a class of

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<sup>34</sup> Aslan, 140-170.

<sup>35</sup> Esposito, 192-216.

<sup>36</sup> Wiktorowicz, 25.

<sup>37</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Haddad and Smith, xv-xvi.

<sup>39</sup> Haddad and Smith, xv-xvi.

potential leaders motivated by ideas and agendas not religious in function, but may couch their goals in religious terms in order to gain legitimacy.<sup>40</sup> Immigrant populations find religious leaders who have not finished their religious training, either for personal reasons (aptitude, desire, or resources) or dismissed for radical views. Communities also accept leaders offered from marginalized or radical schools of thought. These ill-trained or biased leaders may heighten an already tense separation between the Muslim communities and non-Muslim observers in the surrounding society.<sup>41</sup>

Many non-Muslim groups have emigrated to Western Europe and the United States and have not had the same religious issues as Islamic communities. In Europe and the United States, the majority of migrant populations departed from areas with a Christian context and found incorporation and practice of their religious beliefs easier in the majority Christian Western states. However, Muslim groups' have a different historical context, especially with reference to religion, that is much different from the West. This perception of conflict is reinforced with the last half century of conflict in the Middle East, which in turn is related, fairly or unfairly, to Islam. Included is the connection of Islam and terrorism because of terrorist actions since the 1970's. While seemingly shallow, the conflict of Christianity and Islam dates to the Crusades and is still a powerful image for both groups; it is a vision of conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

The secular nature of autocratic regimes in Muslim countries and Western democracies also add to this perception. Ironically, the separation of 'church and state' often creates a Muslim perception of persecution and discourages assimilation and integrated communities. The one exception is the United States, where Muslim immigrants in a two to one margin believe newly

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<sup>40</sup> Wiktorowicz, 25-26.

<sup>41</sup> Haddad and Smith, xv-xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, "Islam and the West: Narratives of Conflict and Conflict Transformation," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 9, no. 1, (Spring/Summer 2004): 4-5.

arrived Muslims should adopt American customs.<sup>43</sup> In Western efforts to either prevent the inclusion of religious practice in secular practice (like the crisis of head scarves in France) or ensure religious practice is protected but separate (like British Islamic schools), Western governments only reinforce a stigma for Muslim communities as different. This often equates to bigotry or fear in surrounding non-Muslim communities.<sup>44</sup>

The religious separation also emanates from Muslim perceptions of Western culture and religion. A common perception for Muslims is Western “hedonism,” the belief Westerners have forsaken their faith for the gluttony of secular societies.<sup>45</sup> Images in popular culture and communication often exacerbate this perception, but it fuels an artificial sense of isolation or a siege mentality for Muslim communities.<sup>46</sup> Both concepts demonstrate an ‘us versus them’ mentality in Muslims creating a deep contrast between Muslim and the non-Muslim communities. This exposure to ‘forbidden’ items and actions makes the practice of Islam more difficult and creates a sense of pride in active parishioners as they develop a sense of sacrifice.<sup>47</sup> These forces combine to form a strong identity.

Religion is often a coping mechanism for immigrant populations. It provides a link to traditions comfortable to an immigrant and links them to other immigrants experiencing the same feelings of separation and isolation.<sup>48</sup> Islam’s distinct nature creates more insular communities in Western democracies. The narrative of Muslim immigrants within their religion is reinforced. However, the destructive cycle is fed with the tension between attempting to join a new society

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<sup>43</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Leiken, 7; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, ed., Introduction to *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), x-xi.

<sup>45</sup> Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 132.

<sup>46</sup> Funk and Said, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 132.

<sup>48</sup> Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 127.

and maintain a loyalty to a faith. As Muslims attempt to adapt their religious symbols and structures to secular societies, the perversion creates uneasiness within both communities. Muslims see the use of their rituals as a bridge to greater society as heresy, a ‘selling out’ of the faith, creating a self-loathing, anger, and sense of isolation. Non-Muslims see the religious nature of the mechanisms and can not shed the bigoted view of the group. Both feed and enlarge the other, creating a rich atmosphere for radical politics.<sup>49</sup>

## The Destructive Narrative

The social nature and practices of Islam are in contrast with Western society for both religious and secular reasons. This uniqueness fuels a separation of Muslim communities within Western nations and starts a destructive interaction cycle of interaction, benefiting extremism and disrupting its opponents. The Islamic identity creates a strong contrast, whether real or imagined, between the Muslim Diasporas and the surrounding non-Muslim societies.<sup>50</sup> The contrast, not the religion, creates a prejudiced cycle. Barbara Metcalf states Muslim communities “overcome ethnic customs in favor of a shared normative practice.” The “normative practice” represents or creates a singular presence for a heterogeneous population.<sup>51</sup> If this monolithic portrayal is perceived as strange in any small sense, much less radical or extremist, its combination with existing stereotypes creates a backlash. The Muslim community then turns inward and reinforces the identity, only serving to reinforce the prejudicial view.<sup>52</sup>

International politics reinforce the negative narrative perceptions in Western nations. Both Western European and Muslim American minorities view Western foreign policy as

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<sup>49</sup> Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, ed., preface to *Contesting Rituals: Islam and Practices of Identity-Making*, (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005) xi.

<sup>50</sup> Funk and Said, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Metcalf, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Haddad and Smith, xi-xii.



exploitative of Muslim countries, often described as the Crusader mentality.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, the non-Muslims of Western states view Muslim minority support for extremist actions (i.e. suicide bombers) as an indication of an inherent nature of Islamic communities, whether minorities in the West or majorities in the Middle East.<sup>54</sup> Muslim American leaders believe the United States has an inherently biased and undemocratic policy with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and that it illustrates the continuing divide between Muslim Americans and the American government. They argue American foreign policy decisions in the Middle East are the main reason extremists exist and can recruit.<sup>55</sup>

Compounded to these concerns is the Western nations' policies and support of autocratic regimes in Muslim countries (i.e. Egypt, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and Saudi Arabia), which Western Muslim leaders also view as a reason extremists form and fight. In a lecture, Dr. Mohammed Hafez stated the main reason extremist groups exist in the Middle East is the autocratic regimes in Muslim countries; these regimes are more concerned with survival than providing for their populations and their policy priorities are structured accordingly. When asked what the reason was for extremists in Western minorities, he responded the same reasons applied, that Muslim minorities often fled autocratic Muslim regimes and maintained their negative views. He went on to illustrate factors of minority status, European policies toward immigrants and an imagined community (possible through the internet and television) compound Muslim negative perception of Western policy.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 4, 15; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 5, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Council on American-Islamic Relations, American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims (Washington, DC: CAIR Research Center, 2006), 1, 7.  
<http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 4, 15; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 5, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Mohammed Hafez, "Struggle in Muslim World: Moderate versus Extremism," Lecture, Overland Park JCC, Kansas, October 17, 2007. Interviewed Muslim leaders also listed similar reasons for

Discussion of Western policy is split into two competing camps. The first is best described as the “clash of civilizations” concept, where academics and policy makers view the current conflict as a battle between the secular modernized West and the Islamic East; it is a monolithic view of the threat similar to the foreign policy views of the Cold War.<sup>57</sup> The second holds the conflict is political in nature, not religious or a clash of civilizations: the West dramatizes and misunderstands for its own purposes.<sup>58</sup> This group uses the example of US and European support of autocratic and Islamic Muslim countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), showing a regime’s composition is immaterial if its views correspond politically with Western objectives.<sup>59</sup> These ideas inform Western governments’ actions, often resulting in a divide in US and European thought.<sup>60</sup> The liberal approach is closely associated with European policy and the conservative approach with the United States.

The individual is the central figure in extremism, and the conditions that act upon a person create the level of risk or likelihood of radicalization. While these conditions are predictive of a person’s propensity for extremism, they do not act until the individual experiences the cognitive opening, a catalyst that leads to the personal search for resolution. The greatest contributing factor is the destructive narrative between Muslims and non-Muslims. It creates a perception of intractable differences between both groups; for a minority Muslim in a democracy this view is destructive. Importantly, the same conditions that generate the risks for individual radicalization also reinforce the efforts of extremist groups. The next section illustrates that the

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Muslim concerns and listed US foreign policy with respect to the Middle East as the main reason for extremism.

<sup>57</sup> This position is best represented by Samuel Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*.

<sup>58</sup> Amin Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Saikal, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within*, (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 3.

greater the number of contributing factors acting upon a community, the greater ease with which extremist organizations recruit and operate. Lastly, Islam as a religion is not a root cause for Muslim extremism. However, because of its importance to Muslim identity, Islam is either a contributing or mitigating factor, depending on what groups gain control of its interpretation. For extremist groups, Islam is an important frame of reference that they must define for individuals and communities to see success.

## **Group Roles in Extremism**

Groups and organizations vie to gain an individual's allegiance and support, especially when he starts to question his beliefs and searches for an answer to his issue. While the focus is often on extremist organizations and their efforts to create the environment for radicalization, moderate and mainstream community elements and the government actions are just as important. The latter groups are often absent from the process and therefore cede the initiative to extremist ideology, or their actions are counterproductive and serve to reinforce extremist messages. There are several theories that model the behavior of groups in this process, but socialization and social movement theory are the strongest in explaining the relationship between the individual and the group. The dependent component of both ideas is the frame of reference and how that is manipulated for group goals.

Socialization is the creation of belief and ideology within a person. Wiktorowicz states "socialization redefines self-interest, and helping produce the collective good is a means, not an end toward fulfilling individual spiritual goals."<sup>61</sup> The person's cognitive opening is the catalyst for his radicalization. Extremist ideologies use social networks to create havens for dialogue, creating the conditions for a person to align their self-interest with the extremist doctrine. Critical to religious radicalization is the idea of salvation, a person's belief that his actions in this world,

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<sup>61</sup> Wiktorowicz, 18, 28.

no matter the nature, are the means to salvation. The progression then becomes clear: the group convinces the person salvation is their main self-interest, persuades him the group's interpretation of salvation is the one way, thus removing the person's aversion to violence or criminality because these acts are a means in this world to the true end, salvation.<sup>62</sup> According to Wiktorowicz, socialization is key to understanding mobilization in religious groups because it is easier to convince people that the radical ideology is an extension or already reflective of the belief system a person accepts as their own (life-long adherents) or they have chosen to follow (converts).<sup>63</sup>

Extremist groups must create a foundation of networks, forums and opportunities to make contact with individuals and exploit their moment of question. Radical activists use social networks which already exist in mosques, schools, study groups and youth programs to identify and approach recruits; they are also using the Internet to provide the same sense of sanctuary and outlet the social enclaves require to mature the process.<sup>64</sup> Within these enclaves, indoctrination includes debate, discussion and dialogue, but not coercion. The socialization progression requires persuasion because it is important the person believes he has come to the conclusion independent of the group. The individual convinced of the extremist doctrine makes a cost-benefit analysis of his potential action within the framework of the extremism belief idea. It provides the basis for the use of violence, cognizant it could likely lead to death.

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<sup>62</sup> Wiktorowicz, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Wiktorowicz, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Stew Magnuson, "War of Words," *National Defense* 92, no. 644 (July 2007): 16. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdlink?vinst=PROD&fmt=3&startpage=-1&ver=1&vname=PQ> (accessed February 15, 2008); Christopher Dickey, "Inside the Cyber-Jihad," *Newsweek* 150, no. 5 (July 30, 2007): 29. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=4&hid=7&sid=b6f92f53-38be-4af3-971a-10> (accessed February 15, 2008).

Socialization is a solid model for western Muslim communities. Wiktorowicz uses it to analyze the al-Mahajiroun extremist group in Great Britain.<sup>65</sup> Strong contributing factors exist in western Muslim communities that create the spiritual conflict and search for identity, especially in second and third generation Muslims like those discussed earlier. Within Muslims enclaves, Islamic infrastructure exists to protect the overall group identification with their religion; Muslim and non-Muslim leaders both protect these schools and mosques for reasons of cultural identity and secular government. Western Muslims have greater access to the internet and electronic media (TV, CDs, DVDS, etc). The vulnerability of Islam is critical as its decentralized nature allows extremist ideology to penetrate these social forums. In the end, Muslim individuals, raised under Islamic beliefs but in a confused state of what interpretation represents their values, make the conscious choice that an extremist explanation of salvation justifies violent resistance to governments and people opposed to their group's doctrine, including the deaths of civilians or themselves.

Social movement theory is another model with which to analyze the behavior of groups. It has similar components to socialization but it holds that groups do not create the beliefs or ideologies, only exploits them. Social movements materialize when collective dissatisfaction festers and existing institutions cannot handle or respond to it. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diana state social movements are "... (1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest."<sup>66</sup> The social movement develops interpretative frames which connect the movement's leaders and the constituents. The frames are aligned through a motivation for change and a cultural understanding of that need. The networks of the leaders and the groups

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<sup>65</sup> The analysis of the al-Mahajiroun is contained in the book Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*.

<sup>66</sup> Della Porta and Diani, 16.

within the frames aid their arrangement into the movement's identity or identities, facilitating collective action. The identity drives the movement's forms of protest (collective action) aimed at undermining the influence of the ruling polity and at the same time reinforcing and building support.<sup>67</sup>

In social movements, groups with similar values and beliefs coalesce around an issue and in turn develop a way to address it based on their frames of reference and values. Therefore the greatest contrast between socialization and social movement is the formation of a belief system or ideology. In social movement theory, the ideology already exists; it gains support and advocates as its form of resistance gains credibility in addressing the perceived tyranny of the social or political environment. In socialization, the ideology is created to answer the conflict.

### Extremist Organizations: Making Religion Political

In Western nations, extremists realize the environment is both lucrative and dangerous. The majority of Western minority Muslims oppose violence as a means to political ends; overt and radical recruiting methods possible in the more permissive cultural and political environments of the Middle East, Africa and South Asia would likely result in moderate Western Muslim leaders and communities rejecting or turning on those radical groups.<sup>68</sup> However, the underpinnings of Islamic extremism in all its forms affect Western Muslims as much as Islamic communities in the Middle East. As governments compete with extremist opposition for the support of citizens, local leaders also fight with radicalization to ensure the viability of their communities within Western Europe and America.

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<sup>67</sup> See Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 11; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 52.

Extremist ideologies use framing to enhance the individual's contributing factors and produce an environment conducive to recruitment. Framing is the most important aspect of the groups' actions; it exploits a person's self-identity to validate the extremist philosophy and belief system.<sup>69</sup> The factors that predict a person's propensity to adopt an extremist ideology are also enhanced as the framing facilitates the rationalization that the extremist ideology adequately explains the reasons for these problem factors. Social networks exist within the religious context of immigrants. As immigrants use religion as a coping mechanism, especially second and third generations, they develop the social networks that facilitate the tools of extremism. Since extremists pervert the religious frame of identity, they can use religious structures, networks and leaders to reinforce and facilitate their message.

Muslims minority leaders have a difficult task. In Europe and America, they view Western policies, most importantly in the United States, as harmful to the relationship between their communities and the larger non-Muslim societies; specifically, they believe it reinforces negative stereotypes of Muslims among the general public.<sup>70</sup> When they do not publicly denounce extremist actions or are perceived to defend extremist ideology, Muslim communities are labeled supporters of terrorism, a claim they strongly deny, especially in the United States. On the other hand, Muslim leaders' perceived collaboration or complicity with Western governments undermines the Muslim community's trust and confidence in their leaders, creating an environment conducive to radicalization. In a worst case scenario, leaders inadvertently reinforce non-Muslim public stereotypes about the religion of Islam while facilitating extremist ideology.

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<sup>69</sup> The term framing is closely associated with social movement theory, but use of a common reference, or frame, is also used in socialization. In Muslim extremist ideology, Islam is the predominant framing tool.

<sup>70</sup> Saikal, 8, 11; Mamdani, 14; Radwan A Masmoudi, "How and Why the US Can Lose the War on Terror," Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy, Unpublished Article, 1-4.

For both socialization and social movement theory, Islam is critical as a frame of reference for extremist efforts. In both theories, groups use the frame of reference to bolster the legitimacy of their argument. Because the person at risk is experiencing a cognitive break, he is questioning his belief system and it is easier for groups to remold the person's familiar Muslim values into the group's ideology using Islamic themes. However, groups can not start this process unless the individual has a cognitive opening, thus making the contributing factors more important to extremist organizations. Without conditions to increase the risk to communities, extremist organizations would not have the potential candidates to approach and convince. Therefore, contributing factors are important both to individual and group analysis. In socialization, groups focus on themes to co-opt individuals with greater propensity for radicalization; they use contributing factors, especially the narrative, to reinforce their ideology. In social movement theory, contributing factors create an environment where individuals coalesce to collectively address their issues. Extremist groups pitch their ideology as a legitimate method to solve issues surrounding the contributing factors. For minority Muslim populations in Western states, contributing factors overcome the ideals of democracy, creating conditions where individuals and communities are angry at their exclusion or failure within a democratic society. Extremist ideology exploits the factors to gain support and execute their counter vision for the world.

## **Muslim Immigrant Minorities in Western Democracy: Highs and Lows**

Muslim immigrants to Western nations do not have a different story than other immigrant groups. The reasons for their migration to Europe and the United States are not unique except for the specific stories of their homeland and each individual family's or person's story; they come for a chance at prosperity and a new life without violence. The first significant wave of immigration began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the interwar period of the world wars. The collapse of both the Ottoman Empire and colonial exploitation led to the migration of



Muslims into Europe and, to a smaller extent, the United States. In the United States many immigrants settled in the Midwest in cities like Detroit, Chicago and Buffalo because of jobs in American manufacturing.<sup>71</sup> After World War II a second migration happened. In Europe, immigrants were needed to rebuild Europe, in particular Germany and France, and they were eager to exploit the possibility of economic prosperity there and the United States, which was experiencing an economic boom. A third wave left the Middle East in the 1960's and 1970's due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Lebanese civil war, other conflicts in the region and the possibility of work in the West; they followed the first waves to already established enclaves in Western states. Groups immigrated in the 1980's and 1990's for similar reasons in response to the Iranian Revolution, Yemeni civil war and the Persian Gulf War.<sup>72</sup>

The predominant reason for immigration was and is for economic reasons.<sup>73</sup> While ideas of democracy and freedom of religion are important, each wave of migration was looking to escape the poverty of their homeland. Before, during and after World War I, the lands and periphery of the Ottoman Empire were suffering from the chronic neglect of administrative and development processes.<sup>74</sup> In Africa and Asia, Muslim populations gained access to Western nations as their lands were tethered to colonial governments and companies. Colonial subjects of Muslim areas were recruited to fight for their colonial masters, bringing them in greater contact with the richness of the West or physical contact in fighting for Europe.<sup>75</sup> After World War II, Western nations needed workers to rebuild their nations or maintain the pace of the American boom. As the number of immigrant populations grew and the conflicts of Africa, Middle East

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<sup>71</sup> Visit to Arab-American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

<sup>72</sup> Hunter, preface to *Islam: Europe's Second Religion*, xi.

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, preface to *Islam: Europe's Second Religion*, xi.

<sup>74</sup> See David Fromkin, *Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: Henry Holt, 2001) and Efraim Karsh, *Empires of Sand: The Struggle for Mastery in the Middle East*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> Leveau and Hunter, "Islam in France," in Hunter, 3, 5.

and Asia increased, successive waves of immigrants followed the prosperity of their relatives, settling in the same enclaves, maintaining a steady contact with their homeland. In this spirit, the main drive for Muslim migrations is not significantly different from other immigrant communities but their nature and global events has changed the dynamic of their character.

## **European Muslim Communities: Overcoming Family History**

European Muslims have existed since the beginning of Islam, as the early Caliphates controlled or influenced large portions of Spain and Southeastern Europe. Current issues are traced to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the colonial expansion of the Western European states. Though they exist in democracies, Muslim immigrant populations in Western Europe have experienced more factors conducive to extremism than to integration. Collectively, they endure a greater number of contributing factors for radical Islamic ideology and very few mitigating factors to counter those effects. European Muslim leaders are trapped in a dilemma; both their followers and their secular governments often view their actions and words as insufficient, thus creating the situation where they can do no right. In addition, many of the policies of Western European are inadequate and counter-productive because of domestic politics and competing national constituencies. The combination of inaction and failed action, in an atmosphere of fracture, allows extremist groups to thrive.

## **European Muslims: Many Troubling Propensities, Little Mitigation**

The most significant factor contributing to extremism in European Muslim communities is the homogenous nature of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This particular issue was illustrated in a 2006 Pew Global Attitudes Project. When asked, “What do you consider yourself first?” Muslims in European countries overwhelmingly identified themselves as Muslim first.

Their percentages corresponded with Muslim states like Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and Pakistan.<sup>76</sup> Europeans overwhelmingly identified themselves first as citizens of their state.<sup>77</sup> The stark contrast in perceived identity is one example of the effects of two relatively homogenous populations interacting in the same space and competing for the prominent role of defining their society's nature. It only serves to enhance the tension between the Muslim immigrant population and the surrounding non-Muslim society and it underlies all the contributing factors, Muslim leader actions and the policies of Western European governments. The history of Western European states' formation and their subsequent colonial legacies created European states with extremely strong national identities with strong tendencies to reject religion in favor of secular traditions.<sup>78</sup> The Muslim populations in Western Europe have a more homogenous nature reflecting the former subjects of the European nation or a long time relationship (i.e. Turks in Germany). Colonial policies ensured the settlement of immigrants in enclaves, originally intended to be temporary and placed away from main society, reflecting the racism of colonialism.<sup>79</sup> Subsequent migration, even after the end of colonies, represented a continuing cycle where successive immigrants settled in the same areas due to connections to family, ethnicity, religion, and most importantly, jobs. The enduring heritage of colonialism has guaranteed resentment when immigrants reflect on the location and nature of their neighborhoods. This clash of homogenous groups forms the basic building blocks of conflict in Europe as both groups start their interaction from very distant positions with little perceived commonality.

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<sup>76</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 3. The one exception was Muslims in France who did not have a majority for either and were statistically split 42% to 46%.

<sup>77</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Hunter and Serftay, introduction to *Islam: Europe's Second Religion*, xiv.

<sup>79</sup> Leiken, 2.

This construct of distinct identities informs the troubling factors that contribute to extremism. The relative size of the Muslim immigrant populations creates an issue for Europe. It is estimated Muslims make up four to five percent of the European population, with an expectation it will double in the next twenty years. In comparison, the best estimates have the US Muslim population less than two percent of the American population.<sup>80</sup> The rise in number of Muslim immigrants represents a dramatic increase in influence and potential issues. However, Islamic communities are not well organized politically and operate at a disadvantage in European politics, contributing to the perception of ‘haves’ (Europeans) and ‘have nots’ (Muslims).

Compounding the population issue is unemployment rates for European Muslims are double that of non-Muslims.<sup>81</sup> The social welfare policies of European nations ensure immigrants remain versus returning to their home country; the standard of welfare living in Europe is still greater than living in their home country.<sup>82</sup> However, these policies do not remove the individual’s declining sense of worth or address the perceived prejudice against employing Muslims. The unintended consequences of an increasing population and perceived or actual bigotry in employment practices drive a larger wedge between the two communities. It leaves numerous unemployed and unengaged young males angry about their lot in life and looking for answers to their problems.

### European Muslim Leaders: Horns of the Dilemma

Moderate Western European Muslim leaders do not control the messages of their communities because of their fractured organizations and a natural inclination not to participate in politics. Ironically, though perceived as homogenous populations, Muslim communities in

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<sup>80</sup> Leiken, 1.

<sup>81</sup> National Statistics Online, “Labour Market: Muslim unemployment rate highest,” 21 February 2006. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=979> (accessed 2/4/2008).

<sup>82</sup> Cesari, 151.

European nations do have multiple origins and develop multiple organizations to address issues. Homogeneity is perceived because there are one to three ethnic groups in each country related to past colonial relationships; while not always majorities they are much larger in proportion to smaller groups and they come to represent all of the groups, usually through Islamic networks.<sup>83</sup> However, Muslim communities do not speak with one voice even within these large groups. For example, the Turkish population in Germany is segmented with competing Islamic and secular organizations, which sometime have contradictory messages and goals.<sup>84</sup> Similar situations exist in each country. In this vacuum of clear leadership and combined effort, the message of moderate or pluralist leaders is often lost. Without a clear leader, Western governments form policy and opinion on the actions of the more visible and radical elements of Muslim communities.<sup>85</sup> Most Muslims respond these elements do not represent them but at the same time they accuse European society of prejudicial views of Islam. This continues the cycle of accusation and counter accusation that feeds an argument in extremes. Moderate European Muslim leaders are hampered from entering the dialogue. They do not have a combined voice or organization or they react emotionally to government actions and refuse to engage in discussion to mitigate issues.<sup>86</sup> This absence of leadership allows extremist groups to operate freely and perpetuate the destructive narrative to facilitate their message and recruitment.

In this context, moderate leaders have difficulty contesting Muslim and European perceptions. Moderate Muslim leaders find it hard to combat extremist claims of European prejudice when their groups are not represented in government, they are twice as likely to face poverty and joblessness, they are held separate from the greater society because of negative

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<sup>83</sup> Leveau and Hunter, "Islam in France," in Hunter, 6; John Rex, "Islam in the United Kingdom," in Hunter, 32; Andreas Goldberg, "Islam in Germany," in Hunter, 55.

<sup>84</sup> Andreas Goldberg, "Islam in Germany," in Hunter, 43.

<sup>85</sup> Andreas Goldberg, "Islam in Germany," in Hunter, 43.

<sup>86</sup> Ramadan, "Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?" in Hunter, 217.

government policies, and they face bigotry in education, jobs and daily life. Conversely, moderates also find it taxing to convince European society and governments that extremist actions do not represent their societal norms while protesting government policies enacted to limit religious freedom or expression in secular societies. In arguing against restrictions, they inherently place themselves in conflict with the belief system of the greater European society, making it easier for Europeans and governments to perceive the arguments of moderates and extremists as the same message only slightly nuanced.<sup>87</sup> The net effect is devastating to a moderate mitigating message. European Muslim leaders are viewed either as government collaborators and lose the ability to influence and counter radicalization in their communities, or they are viewed in league with extremists and lose the ability to converse in a productive manner with European governments.

### European Countries: Democracy but Only For ‘Europeans’

Western European governments have attempted many different policies to mitigate or block the efforts of extremist, but they have not overcome the prejudice of past policies and the economic situation of Muslim immigrants. Their policies are contradictory in nature; they fail to recognize Islam as on par with other religions but use Islamic organizations to mediate governance disputes. There are numerous examples throughout Western European nations. The French government initially established policies to not grant citizenship and did not recognize Islam as a religion with parity with Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), which has a relationship within the French secular government construct. However, the French government did use Muslim organizations to resolve worker issues and facilitate community improvements.<sup>88</sup> In Germany, family unification policies of the 1970’s changed the nature of the Muslim

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<sup>87</sup> Leveau and Hunter, “Islam in France,” in Hunter, 11; Ramadan, “Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?” in Hunter, 209-210.

<sup>88</sup> Leveau and Hunter, “Islam in France,” in Hunter, 14, 19-20.

population, increasing its size, increasing women and children and increased visibility of traditional customs with families (especially women and children).<sup>89</sup> In response, the German government established policies intended to reduce immigration and limit citizenship, did not recognize Islam as a public body, and set regulations in direct contradiction to Islamic religious practices (preventing halal butchers, Islamic burial, and exceptions for Muslims girls in school).<sup>90</sup> While it is easier for Muslims to become citizens and vote in the United Kingdom, government policies are perceived as prejudiced with tendencies to allow Muslim organizations to act as representatives of the government with respect to government services, preventing the establishment of Muslim representation in the government.<sup>91</sup>

The combined effect is to create a destructive paradox that feeds the negative narrative. In each case, Muslims emigrated, and subsequent generations stayed, for the economic opportunities, and European nations were eager to use their work to fuel their economy. However, when Muslim labor was no longer needed and their presence was seen as a burden, European governments responded with prejudiced government policies designed to limit immigration and participation in their adopted society. In turn, Muslim communities turned inward, usually to their religion, and became more separated from the surrounding society, reinforcing negative perceptions and stereotypes.<sup>92</sup> The conflict between these two homogenous populations magnifies the propensity of radicalism. The government and greater society explicitly or implicitly hampers immigrant representation in a democratic state, which reinforces extremist messages and themes. The combined effects of ghettos, contrasting religious and cultural differences, economic disparity and governmental double-standard contribute to a sense

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<sup>89</sup> Andreas Goldberg, "Islam in Germany," in Hunter, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Andreas Goldberg, "Islam in Germany," in Hunter, 43-44.

<sup>91</sup> John Rex, "Islam in the United Kingdom," in Hunter, 71.

<sup>92</sup> Hunter and Serftay, introduction to *Islam: Europe's Second Religion*, xv.

of Muslim isolation. Without mitigation, this litany of dangerous forces creates an atmosphere ripe for exploitation.

### **Muslim American Community: Living the Dream**

In contrast to their European counterparts, American Muslims experience very few of the negative factors necessary for extremists to thrive, and mitigating factors exist that counter the efforts of extremists. Overall, American Muslims have found success in the United States and it is the greatest counter to radicalization; they have a stake in the success of their adopted society, making them less likely to find extremist methods as valid means to address concerns. However, the current world context threatens to give greater weight to issues that create greater potential for Muslim American radicalization and extremism. While Muslim Americans have found economic prosperity and social success, the Global War on Terror threatens to widen the perception gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, forming the potential for a sense of isolation and persecution. The greatest risk in the United States is for Muslim Americans to stop feeling like Americans.

### **America's Contributing Factors: Mostly Mitigation But With Possible Danger**

Two important factors exist in the United States to mitigate extremism: Muslims view themselves like other Americans and they have found success in America. With these factors, Muslim Americans have shown their attachment to American society and they have a stake in its success. They share many of the same characteristics of European Muslims: most migrated for economic reasons, the special nature of Islam in a secular society, the difficulty in finding qualified religious teachers, scholars and leaders, and both have Muslims and non-Muslims perception concerns. However, in terms of self-description, composition, and goals, American Muslims are very similar to the general American public and most significantly, American



Christians.<sup>93</sup> It is in stark contrast with how Western Europeans and European Muslims view themselves and each other.

In terms of percentages, American Muslims do not differ significantly from the general American public in their views on the importance of hard work, community health, financial satisfaction, and the state of the US. As a group, Muslim Americans are nearly identical to the general US public in terms of education and household income.<sup>94</sup> These figures represent the greatest break with European Muslim communities. When viewed as income disparity, US Muslims do not deviate from the US public by more than 2%; in great contrast, European Muslims are 18% to 22% more likely to be in the lowest income bracket and 10% to 19% less likely to be in highest income bracket.<sup>95</sup> This recognizable factor fuels negative European Muslim perceptions, especially in the more affected younger, Muslim male population and is related to the unemployment problem. Importantly, American Muslims are finding the American dream economically while European Muslims are not, forcing them to reconcile the ideals of Western prosperity and their plight.

When asked, “Do you think of yourself first as an American or first as a Muslim (or Christian)?,” forty-seven percent of American Muslims describe themselves as Muslim first, a statistic comparable to the forty-two percent of American Christians who described themselves a Christian first.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, Western Europe has a very clear divide with a clear majority of

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<sup>93</sup>The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*

<sup>94</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans* 2, 18.

<sup>95</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 19.

<sup>96</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 8, 31.

Muslims answering Muslim first and non-Muslims answering their nationality first.<sup>97</sup> Also significant, American Muslims and Christians have very similar views on the importance of religion and their formal observance of their religion (i.e. church/mosque attendance and daily prayer).<sup>98</sup> However, these statistics also relate to the perception gap between Muslims and non-Muslims; the more Christians think they are Christian and Muslims think they are Muslim, the greater potential the groups would be unable to reconcile their perceptions of each other.

These mitigation factors are very powerful. However, there are gaps in views that fuel negative narratives and are the potential issues extremists could exploit in North America. While Muslim Americans share very similar motives with many other immigrant groups, their diverse make-up is a unique characteristic.<sup>99</sup> This factor falls into contested ground; because it relates to Islam, could represent a risk or mitigation for Muslims. The American heterogeneous blend (many countries, ethnicities and area origins) differs from European Muslim populations, which usually represent homogenous populations from former colonies, and previous US immigrant groups, which often represent homogenous ethnic populations.<sup>100</sup> This melting pot of multiple cultural identities dramatically strengthens their one common unifying characteristic, Islam. Differing groups and ethnicities, who are in conflict in their home countries coalesce in the United States and Europe under the umbrella of Islam, heightening its position, importance and influence. This unifying feature becomes critical in individuals, especially for first and second generation native born Muslims. First generation immigrants in the United States may remember conflicts within migrated sects from home countries, but second, third, and older generations

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<sup>97</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe*, 11; The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 27.

<sup>99</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 2, 15.

<sup>100</sup> Haddad and Smith, vi.

understand a different context where religion is predominant and they live in a non-Muslim society. Therefore, in America, later generations of Muslim immigrants have a greater sense of their religion's role in their identity.<sup>101</sup> American perceptions of Islam and Muslim peoples quicken this sense of artificial community; whereas with first generation immigrants it was the drastic differences in culture and customs from traditional European immigrants. Now perceptions are shaped by current conflicts.<sup>102</sup> In successful communities will strength the values of Islam. For communities in peril and in the absence of moderate leadership, it could provide a network for extremist ideologies.

This mixed arrangement of Muslim groups also includes the uniquely American subset of US Muslims: African-American converts. Many African-Americans converted to Islam as part of the Nation of Islam separatist movement in the 1930's and then again in the 1960's and 1970's. It was a movement first organized among blacks in the ghettos of Detroit in response to the Great Depression. Their leaders have included Eljah Mohammed, Malcom X, and Louis Farrakhan.<sup>103</sup> Because of their foundation in the black community, members of the Nation of Islam are focused on issues specific to race and their agenda includes the idea of a separate black state for Muslim African-Americans.<sup>104</sup> Not surprisingly, converts and native-born African-American Muslims are more likely to advocate a distinct Muslim identity versus assimilation.<sup>105</sup> They are also more likely to respond they have experienced an act of intolerance.<sup>106</sup> This represents a combination of their racial and religious identity, but affects a wider audience of Muslims. Though the Nation of

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<sup>101</sup> Haddad and Smith, x-xi.

<sup>102</sup> Abdo, 5.

<sup>103</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West*, trans. Susan Milner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4, 13, 15

<sup>104</sup> Kepel, 15-19.

<sup>105</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 33.

<sup>106</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 37.

Islam and other Muslim immigrants have not shown an ability to cooperate or integrate their efforts, this subset of Muslim Americans is a concern for the larger group.<sup>107</sup> It is a group that utilizes the Islamic faith as a framework in a similar manner as other extremism organizations and has a population with an increased number of risk factors like racism, perceived segregation, economic hardship and others. African-American Muslims represent a population within the United States that extremism groups could exploit.

Though heterogeneity is the one aspect of US Muslim groups significant from other nations, its significance is hotly contested. Muslim academics and groups assert Islam is too often used as the 'bogeyman,' that which explains all issues related to Muslim Americans. They hold ethnicity, race, and denomination mitigate the significance of an overall Islamic identity.<sup>108</sup> They argue this perception of a greater Islamic identity is compounded with the lack of knowledge about Islam in the United States and with the Global War on Terror. The lack of positive news about Islam combined with the lack of familiarity and political goals create the perception of a monolithic Muslim bloc.<sup>109</sup> Also, many of the foreign policy issues with which American Muslims show concern are not separated by ethnicity, they are mostly uniform throughout the population.<sup>110</sup> Though there are domestic issues which may separate Islamic

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<sup>107</sup> Ali A Mazrui, "Between the Crescent and the Star-Spangled Banner: American Muslims and US Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 72, no. 3 (July 1996), 498, 504-505.  
[Http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-5850%28199607%2972%3A3%3C493%3ABTCATS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-5850%28199607%2972%3A3%3C493%3ABTCATS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-7) (accessed October 3, 2007); Lamis Andoni and Robert Marquand, "Muslims Learn to Pull Political Ropes in US," *Christian Science Monitor* 48, vol. 88 (February 5, 1996) 5.  
<http://web.ebxcohost.com/ehost/delivery?vid=12&sid=20477236-5433-4402-8e8c-7d72e91c346a%> (accessed February 4, 2008).

<sup>108</sup> Mazrui, 493-498.

<sup>109</sup> Saikal, 8; Council on American-Islamic Relations, "Western Muslim Minorities: Integration and Disenfranchisement," CAIR Policy Bulletin (April 2006), 2-3.  
<http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans* 5, 33; Council on American-Islamic Relations, "American Muslim Voters: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes," (Council on American Islamic Relations Research

converts and immigrants in the United States, they are convergent in their description of their identity and foreign policy concerns no matter their ethnic or racial background.

However, US Muslim religious views also demonstrate that dangerous issues exist within the community. When compared to Muslim populations worldwide, especially in Europe, a much smaller percentage of US Muslims believe suicide bombings can be justified, but 8% of the US Muslim communities see suicide bombings as justifiable.<sup>111</sup> Significantly, younger Muslims are twice as likely to view suicide bombings as justified; this corresponds to percentages for European Muslim communities.<sup>112</sup> Additionally, in the US, younger Muslims are more likely to attend mosque regularly, describe religion as very important, more likely to identify themselves as Muslim first (versus nationality), and they constitute the largest and fastest growing population within the US Islamic community (in particular non-African-American native born).<sup>113</sup> Young Muslims, second generation or later immigrants, who demonstrate sympathetic views for violent action commensurate with extremist actions (i.e. suicide bombings or violence against civilians) and a self-identity different from that of their parents and their larger community represent a population that has a dramatically greater number of contributing factors making it vulnerable to extremist ideology. While currently other factors mitigate those concerns in the US (e.g. economic health, corresponding views with the American public), a greater influx of radicalized immigrants from Europe or elsewhere combined with a negative change in perceptions, US

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Center, Oct 24, 2006), 14-15. <http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>111</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 53. Overall, 8% of US Muslims view suicide bombing as justified as compared to 16% in Great Britain and France and 15% in Spain; the percentages for Turkey and Pakistan were similar to Western European countries, 17% and 14% respectively. Percentages are much higher for countries in the Middle East and Africa.

<sup>112</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 53-54.

<sup>113</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 17, 26, 31.

Muslims or the US public, would create a dangerous potential for an increase in the likelihood of US extremist activity.<sup>114</sup>

## US Muslim Leaders: Trying to Preserve the Dream

American Muslim leaders have critical capabilities in affecting extremist ideological; as different country and ethnic groups gather into united Islamic communities, their influence gains similar significance to the formal and informal leaders of their home countries.<sup>115</sup> They have the same ability to influence the individual, either to mitigate the dangerous conditions or compete for the recruitment of the individual if the conditions exist. Current efforts are two pronged in nature. First, Muslim organizations attempt to inform both their own groups and the general population about Islam and the nature of their communities with a focus on the similarities between Muslims and non-Muslims, specifically their heritage, traditions and characteristics. Second, they use the same networks as extremist groups in order to engage the greatest at-risk groups, usually first and second generation native-born, well educated males.

One major hurdle remains for Muslim academics and leaders; their focus on contributing factors outside their communities, such as Western governments' foreign policy or the actions of Muslim autocratic states, as the reasons for the negative perception of Muslim minorities. Muslim leaders must acknowledge their religion plays a role for extremist groups. If European and US Muslim leaders do not explicitly acknowledge this connection, at least within their own communities, they are at risk to lose the initiative to radicals. The emphasis on positive tenets of Islam and the repudiation of perverted extremist concepts reduces the likelihood extremists use Islam as a tool to convince impressionable recruits

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<sup>114</sup> Leiken, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Bawer, 17-18; Haddad and Smith, introduction to *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, xv.

In the United States, Muslim leaders do not have to face the issue of colonial tradition, or the economic gap between Muslims and non-Muslims. In fact, Muslim Americans strongly identify themselves as Americans in numbers similar to Christian Americans and in stark contrast to European Muslims.<sup>116</sup> Also, older immigrants and their descendants strongly encourage new immigrants to adopt American customs.<sup>117</sup> However, American issues exist in the perceptions of both Muslim and non-Muslims. Muslim Americans strongly believe United States' policy in the Middle East fuels negative stereotypes of Muslims. Polls of the United States' public seem to support this: the greater the understanding or the numbers of contacts Americans have with Muslims, the less likely they are to have negative opinions of Islam and its followers.<sup>118</sup> Muslim Americans are very explicit in their understanding about the perception of their religion, but they do not concede the link between implicit support of political groups who use extremist messages wrapped in Islamic terms and the continued view of Islam and violence.

### American Government and Society: Able and Willing to Help But Unaware

In the United States, Muslim Americans perceive a link between hard work and economic reward. A majority also believe reconciliation is possible between secular and Western societies, but as stated earlier, American Muslims and the American public continue to have a gap in perception in the nature and intentions of each other. While the European approach seems ineffective in mitigating the contributing factors, it does not prove the American approach is

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<sup>116</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 31.

<sup>117</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 33. Non African-American native born and foreign-born immigrants who settled prior to 1990 were the largest percentage of Muslims who advocated adopting American customs. Interviews with first generation Muslim American reiterated this viewpoint.

<sup>118</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Plurality Sees Islam as More Likely to Encourage Violence*, (Washington DC: The Pew Research Center, September 9, 2004), 1-3; Council on American-Islamic Relations, *American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims*, (Council on American Islamic Relations Research Center, Oct 24, 2006), 6-8.  
<http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

always successful. European governments have made domestic policy changes to better integrate Muslim minorities, but they are often not substantial or will take generations to change.

Secondly, Muslim Americans have continued to view themselves as American in spite of anger over United States' foreign policy and the perceived targeting of Muslim civil rights in the United States.<sup>119</sup>

However, risks exist in American Muslim communities that the United States government must acknowledge and address. Wealthier and more educated Muslims in the United States believe it is more difficult to be a Muslim since 9/11.<sup>120</sup> Though government leaders have attempted to separate Islam from terrorism, they have failed to convince the Muslim American community of their sincerity, especially its leaders. After 9/11, some Muslim leaders described the actions of federal law enforcement as a "fishing expedition," an attempt to frighten Muslim citizens into revealing possible information.<sup>121</sup> Similar attitudes against German-Americans in WWI and WWII, the Nisei Japanese in WWII, and blacks during the civil rights era resulted in an information and propaganda effect but they undermined American democratic values. Only Clear victory or United States' public intolerance ended such conflicts. However, the Global War on Terror has continued to perpetuate negative perceptions of Islamic communities, both in government and the public, continuing the destructive cycle described earlier, enabling extremist ideology to find root where it did not have prior credence.

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<sup>119</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 35. 68% of Muslims with a household income of \$100,000 and 65% of Muslims with a graduate degree stated it was more difficult to be Muslim the US since 9/11.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen Sackur, "Shadow over Ramadan," *BBC News*, December 1, 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1685792.stm> (accessed 12 February 2008); Keith Famie, "Doraid Elder," *Our Arab-American Story*, [http://www.ourstoryof.com/arabic/production\\_54.html](http://www.ourstoryof.com/arabic/production_54.html) (accessed February 5, 2008).



## A Way Forward

There is no simple answer to the problems of Muslim minorities in the West. Western nations must protect themselves, but they must also protect their Muslim citizens. Conversely, Muslim minorities will continue their religious beliefs and customs, but must also serve as complete citizens within their non-Muslim societies and actively fight radical and extremist efforts. For Europe, the example of Muslim Americans provides a path to developing mitigating factors to counter extremism. In the United States, both parties must develop methods to bridge the perception gap. The American government has a responsibility to protect Muslim Americans like any other group of citizens committed to the United States. The commitment must include the ideas of civil rights, fair and equitable access, and an acknowledgement of their role in the United States. Muslim Americans also have responsibilities as citizens of the United States. They must not contribute to the narrative, a difficult moral high road their critics may not take. The underlining goal for Europe and America is to find common themes of democracy and pluralism to narrow the perception gap while continue to protect citizens, Muslim and non-Muslim, from acts of extremism.

Europe has a difficult task for both its Muslims and non-Muslims. While it is not in the scope of this paper to suggest policy changes for Europe, their obstacles can inform the issues facing the United States. Both European societies and their Muslim minorities speak in absolute terms, in all or nothing actions, and this narrative is the first and most difficult obstacle.<sup>122</sup> As long as domestic policies and societal practices treat Muslims as non-citizens, Islamic communities will continue to resent the surrounding culture and turn inward. With this introspective defense, extremist groups will have an advantage in gain strength and legitimacy – the actions of the Muslim community and the secular governments reinforce their messages and

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<sup>122</sup> Ramadan, “Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?” in Hunter, 209.

themes. European secular government must make policy changes that protect their ideas of democracy and while including communities that share in their life but have not enjoyed the substantive meaning of the word ‘citizen.’ Policies should address the parity of Islam and other religions within governmental practices, recognize multicultural themes do not destroy national identity and inclusion of those who contribute to and wish to participate in their adopted country.<sup>123</sup> In economics and education, Western European countries must find a path to the American example: hard work and education translates into success. Success creates a stake for individuals and communities in the greater prosperity of their adopted society, and investment in the greater society is a substantial mitigating force against radicalization.<sup>124</sup>

Paradoxically, America has a tremendous capacity for tolerance and, at the same time, prejudice. In his book “American Crescent,” Imam Hassan Qazwini describes his arrival as a new immigrant to the United States.

Upon deplaning at LAX, I handed my passport to the customs official and waited with some apprehension to be waved through. He could have glanced at the previous pages and learned of my trips to Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East, and that I was arriving by way of the United Arab Emirates; he might also have noticed that I hadn’t been to America before, but applied a red stamp in the “Entries” column and ushered me past with an unexpected greeting: ‘Welcome home.’...As I waited for my wife and children to catch up, the words of Imam Ali came to me, a plea for civility and pragmatism over nationalism: ‘Your country does not belong to you more than any other country. The best country is the one that treats you well.’<sup>125</sup>

In contrast, while running for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, Barack Obama was attacked for having the middle name ‘Hussein.’ The accusation was framed such that an Islamic affiliation means an individual can not serve as an elected official in the highest offices because

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<sup>123</sup> Hunter and Serftay, introduction to *Islam: Europe’s Second Religion*, xiv.

<sup>124</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Muslim Americans*, 3, 19. US Muslims mirror US society in education and economics. European Muslims are 15-20% more likely to live in the lowest salary ranges and 15-20% more likely not to have salaries in the highest ranges and they have lower education indicators than the societies they reside.

<sup>125</sup> Imam Hassan Qazwini, *American Crescent* (New York: Random House, 2007), 79.

such a connection implies collusion with extremists and disloyalty to America.<sup>126</sup> The prevention of ‘home grown’ Islamic terrorism starts with the American principles found in the first instance.

The perception gap must narrow from both sides, with American government and society on one track and Muslim Americans on the other. In his book *Militant Islam Reaches America*, Daniel Pipes states “...liberals say co-opt the radicals. Conservatives say confront them. As usual, the conservatives are right.”<sup>127</sup> This all or nothing approach furthers the destructive narrative because it connects Islam and militant extremists using Islam, thus making all Muslims guilty by association. Domestically, Islamic communities have developed a siege mentality, a dangerous factor seen in European communities. Conservative approaches including profiling and intrusive actions since 9/11 have soured potential mitigating Muslim leaders toward government rhetoric.<sup>128</sup> While there are pragmatic reasons for many American domestic and foreign policy decisions and actions, the US government must realize the tactics of success at any cost may erode American principles in the process.

For the American government, words and deeds must match. A disconnect only fuels distrust in the government and removes a strong mitigating factor for Muslim Americans. The 2006 National Security Strategy includes the objectives of “champion aspirations for human dignity” and “expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy.”<sup>129</sup> The supporting themes include the idea of “effective democracies,” nations that are “respectful of human dignity, accountable to their citizens, and

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<sup>126</sup> Alawan interview; Bedoun interview.

<sup>127</sup> Pipes, xv.

<sup>128</sup> Council on American-Islamic Relations, “Western Muslim Minorities: Integration and Disenfranchisement,” CAIR Policy Bulletin (April 2006), 2-3.  
<http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>129</sup> National Security Council, National Security Strategy (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1.

responsible towards their neighbors.”<sup>130</sup> Muslim Americans see US support to autocratic regimes as counter to these ideals and American unconditional support to Israel as prejudicial.<sup>131</sup>

American society can also bridge the gap through education. Polling suggests a correlation between contact and tolerance. People who have a greater education about and contact with Islam are much less likely to associate Islam and violence or negative perceptions. However, the same polling indicates Americans are no more aware of Islam than they were since 9/11.<sup>132</sup> Recently, the media coverage of the bomb placed at the Times Square recruiting center, it was stated the authorities did not believe ‘terrorists’ placed the bomb. While the act met the standard for most definitions of a terrorist act, it was implied it was not an Islamic terrorist.<sup>133</sup> American institutions and individuals have a responsibility to educate themselves on Islam and Muslim Americans.

Muslim Americans have important responsibilities for mitigating factors. First and foremost, they must facilitate the education of non-Muslims. Prior to 9/11, Muslim organizations were not well organized to operate at the national level on issues concerning Islam because there was not perceived need.<sup>134</sup> Since then, organizations have tried to become more active and involved in influencing and shaping public and government views of their Muslim communities. Organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) hold frequent seminars and conferences on topics related

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<sup>130</sup> National Security Council, National Security Strategy (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 4.

<sup>131</sup> Council on American-Islamic Relations, “American Muslim Voters: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes,” (Council on American Islamic Relations Research Center, Oct 24, 2006), 1, 14-17. <http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007). Masmoudi, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Council on American-Islamic Relations, *American Muslim Voters: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes* (Council on American Islamic Relations Research Center, 2006), 3. <http://www.cair.com/AmericanMuslims/ReportsandSurveys.aspx> (accessed December 18, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> The author noted this while watching NBC’s ‘Today’ coverage of the incident. While watching subsequent reports on different news outlets, the same theme was repeated.

<sup>134</sup> Mazrui, 498, 504-505

to Islam and Western society. In Dearborn, Michigan, the new Arab-American National Museum has gained visibility through its quality and numerous educational programs including study for government and military groups. While it celebrates Arab-Americans, it acknowledges the strong ties to Islam.<sup>135</sup> While it is not an equitable split of the effort, Muslim Americans must continue and increase efforts at education. Any withdrawal from positive engagement will create conditions similar to those in Europe, reinforcing negative stereotypes and facilitating extremist efforts.

Lastly, Muslim Americans have to participate with the American government on foreign policy matters. Like any immigrant group, the Islamic communities of the United States are deeply connected to the conflicts in Muslim countries, not only in the Middle East but throughout the world. American policy makers must acknowledge their actions abroad have potential negative meaning to particular groups of American citizens; Muslim communities must also acknowledge the American government may have to take pragmatic measures in order to move processes forward. Charles Alawan stated immigrants have to be “owners” not “renters.” In his explanation, “owners” became apart of their society without surrendering their identity and find the points of convergence. “Renters” participated only in those actions that benefitted them, did not participate in the greater society and maintained a stronger allegiance to their home country.<sup>136</sup> Muslim Americans have started, but they must take a stronger role in shaping their message, which includes a greater propensity to take the bad with the good. Though American foreign policy is often at odds with the majority Muslim opinion, Muslim Americans can not afford to disengage and retreat. As show in Europe, such actions facilitate an enclave mentality and create a potentially dangerous environment.

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<sup>135</sup> The author visited the museum March 11, 2008 and interviewed the Director, Dr. Anan Ameri. During the visit, an US Army unit was receiving a seminar from the Museum. The museum is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution Program.

<sup>136</sup> Alawan interview; Hajj interview.

## Conclusion

American multiculturalism and success have provided the greatest mitigating factors to Islamic extremism absent in European democracies. Muslim American immigrants and their successive families are experiencing the 'American Dream,' confirming the basic compact between immigrants and their adopted country: they are looking for a better life and the country will provide it if they work for it. In Europe, that compact has failed to materialize and European extremism represents the anger at that failure. The United States can look to Europe to see the potential danger. Muslim Americans are beginning to indicate prosperity is insufficient to overcome prejudice, that their government must respect their rights and opinions as much as any other group or interest, foreign or domestic. They feel they have lived up to their end of the contract and expect American society and government to do the same.

The threat of extremism starts with the exploitation of dangerous factors that increase the risk of a population to develop radical and extreme individuals. Extremism forms when an individual experiences a break in their belief system and their perceived reality. The contributing factors will inform the likelihood whether the person chooses an extremist ideology or not. These contributing factors are similar in nature for any extremist: religious, ethnic, political, etc. In the case of Islamic extremists, Islam is important but it is not the root cause; the context of the individual's life is a better indicator of their potential. However, Islam acts as a connection between individuals and groups. The group uses the individual's established framework, Islam, to mold a new belief system, one couched in Islamic terms but not nested in the religion's beliefs. Converts are a good example. Contributing factors (joblessness, prejudice, thrill seeking) lead to conversion as an answer to their issues, but without resolution of their core issues, extremist ideology exploits their vulnerability and their new Islamic framework to provide a 'better' version of Islamic salvation. In the end, the greatest contributing factor is the ongoing narrative of conflict. As minorities, Western Muslims turn inward for defense, which strengthens the

stereotypes of non-Muslim society, and continue to feed the narrative cycle. Extremist groups use this perception to frame a potential recruit's cognition and provide the answer, their ideology.

The destructive narrative of East versus West, Islam versus Christianity, Shari'a versus secularism has existed since the Crusades and has gained new fervor since the fall of the Soviet Union and the start of the Global War on Terror. It is an apt illustration of Muslim minorities in Western democracies: ideas are expressed in absolutes and extremes. In this environment, the narrative amplifies the dangerous factors fueling the propensity of an individual to radicalize. In Europe, inconsistent and competing policies prevent a concentrated approach to create inclusion of Muslims, one that includes governments and communities. In the United States, the promise of reward for hard work has mitigated the dangers of US Islamic terrorists, but the United States has taken for granted Muslim Americans support of the government. The anger and disappointment of Muslim Americans may come to mimic the anger of European enclaves and destroy the effects of American mitigating factors.

The uniqueness of the American way of life, with its promise of reward for enterprise and its relative tolerance of other ideas, has mitigated the ideologies of Islamic extremists. However, there exists the potential for negative change if these mitigating factors disappear because of the efforts of extremists, prejudice on the part of the American government and its people, or failures of Muslim leaders and their communities. American society must realize the kid who played football, basketball or baseball for their high school team is not likely to become a 'home-grown Islamic terrorist' and must reinforce all the positive aspects of his American identity as they relate to his Muslim identity. The risk grows greater if that child develops the belief he is no longer a part of American society *because* he is a Muslim; he will seek to address this imbalance, allowing the potential for extremism. The United States has an opportunity because that child and his family came to the United States to become American, not extremist. To achieve that goal, we must now take the steps to ensure the children of the next generations are not confused and stop

play when the call to prayer begins. The Muslim call to prayer in American must become as benign and celebrated as the ringing of church bells.



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